

# Fundraising and fees

2017

*This report is an excerpt from People for Education's Annual report on Ontario's publicly funded schools 2017.*

Fundraising is deeply entrenched within Ontario's public education system. In 2017, 85% of secondary schools and 98% of elementary schools report raising money, but there is large variation in the amount raised by individual schools. While some schools report raising \$0, others raise as much as \$200,000. A 2013 report by People for Education found a relationship between the amounts schools fundraised and average family incomes.<sup>1</sup> These findings, combined with this year's survey results, raise concerns about the impact of fundraising on equity in the system.

## Existing guidelines for fundraising and fees

Ontario has guidelines for both fundraising and the fees that some schools charge.<sup>2</sup> The guidelines prohibit the use of private funds to cover the cost of items that "replace public education"<sup>3</sup> or are already funded via provincial grants; they also prohibit charging fees for "materials that are required for completion of the curriculum."<sup>4</sup>

Despite the guidelines, data from 2017 show that:

- 48% of elementary and 10% of secondary schools fundraise for learning resources
- 18% of elementary and 6% of secondary schools request a fee for learning resources

## In 2017:

- 48% of elementary schools and 10% of secondary schools fundraise for learning resources (e.g. computers, classroom supplies, etc.)
- Among elementary schools, the lowest 10% of fundraising schools raise one dollar for every \$49 raised by the top 10% of schools.
- The top 5% of fundraising secondary schools raise as much as the bottom 83% combined.

While 99% of all schools report they provide subsidies for students who cannot pay fees, a survey by the Ontario Student Trustees' Association found that 36% of secondary students have experienced fees as a barrier to participation.<sup>5</sup>

## The relationship between fundraising and student success

As the gap between schools raising the highest and lowest amounts of money appears to be widening, experts remain uncertain what these fundraising disparities may mean for the province's schools. One recent study found a small relationship between funds raised and students' EQAO test scores, concluding that fundraising sums are insignificant compared to funds distributed to schools by the province.<sup>6</sup> Others have asserted a stronger relationship between student learning and fundraising, with greatest benefits accruing to a small subset of students within schools.<sup>7</sup>

### Top fundraising schools: widening gaps

Not only is there a wide range in the amounts schools fundraise, but there is also a significant gap between the highest and lowest fundraising schools. In 2017, the top 5% of fundraising secondary schools raised as much as the bottom 83% put together. This gap has persisted for a number of years. In People for Education's three most recent surveys, the top 10% of fundraising secondary schools have raised more than the bottom 90% of schools.

In elementary schools, the gap between the highest and lowest fundraising schools appears to be widening (see Figure 1). The lowest 10% of fundraising elementary schools raise \$1 for every \$49 raised by the top 10% of schools, up from \$1 to \$25 in 2008.

“We have an active school community, and the parents support events and academics in the school. We have used fundraising money to build our technology library (laptops, Chromebooks and iPads).”

Elementary school,  
Trillium Lakelands DSB

Figure 1

### Fundraising ratio between top and bottom deciles of elementary schools

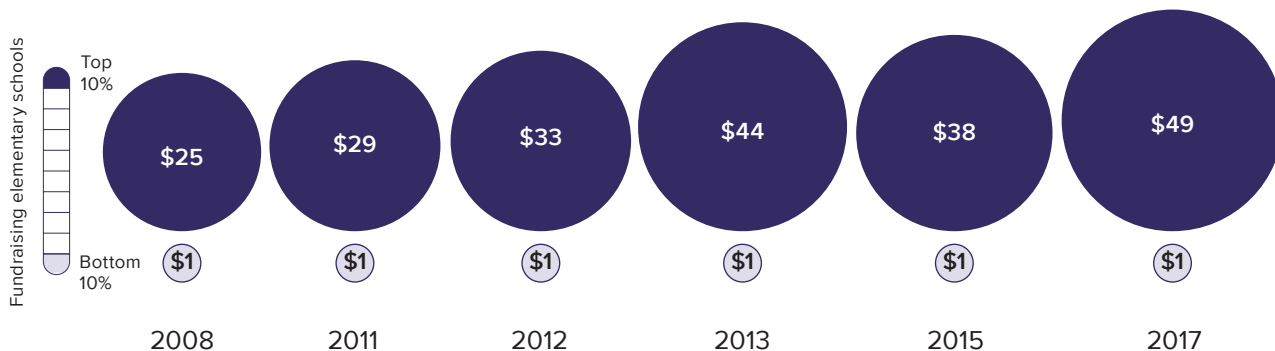
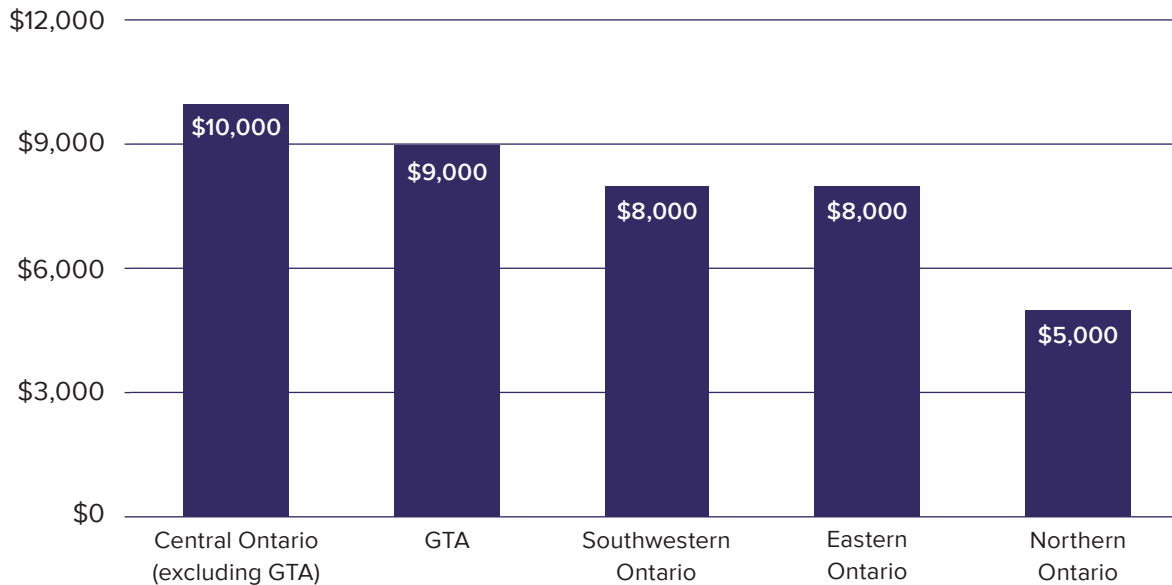


Figure 18

## Median amount fundraised in elementary schools, by region



“Servicing a low socio-economic area makes it challenging to meet the needs of students in all required areas of programming. Nutrition is costly, and fundraising efforts are insignificant. We know that engaging the community in events has a very high impact on our family connection, but these are also costly and there is no funding for these events (food, dancers, etc.).”

Elementary school,  
Lakehead DSB

### Schools identify inequity

In their survey comments, principals frequently reference fundraising when discussing their schools’ overall successes and challenges. For those with extensive fundraising, many describe tools and resources as a source of pride for their school. One school shared that “fundraising money to build our technology library (laptops, Chromebooks and iPads)”<sup>8</sup> was a major success.

On the other side of the spectrum, many schools identify limited fundraising as an explicit challenge. Comments from these schools indicate that their limited fundraising might be exacerbating the inequities between schools. Rather than pointing to a lack of “extras,” these schools reported that without fundraising, they struggle to provide services that support low-income families. For example, one principal noted that their “breakfast/snack program provides nutrition to many children on a regular basis,” but that “fundraising for this initiative can be challenging.”<sup>9</sup> Another shared that they “try to provide clothing for families,” but struggle as they “do not have the fundraising capacity of schools that have parents who are working.”<sup>10</sup>

## Fees for enrichment

While fee guidelines restrict charges for core components of education, there are fewer limits on fees for enrichment activities that may have a positive impact on whole child development.

In 2017, 63% of elementary schools and 89% of secondary schools charged fees for extracurricular activities. Recent research found that extracurricular activities are associated with better academic and psychological outcomes, including less substance abuse and delinquency among participants in extracurricular activities.<sup>11</sup> In addition, studies have found a correlation between programs that promote physical activity and student health and well-being.<sup>12</sup> Charging fees for extracurricular activities may allow certain students the opportunity to develop competencies in broad areas of learning, while leaving other students out.

## Notes

1. People for Education, "Fees and Fundraising," *Annual Report on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools 2013* (Toronto, ON: People for Education, 2013), 8-11.
2. Ontario Ministry of Education, *Fees for Learning Materials and Activities Guideline* (Toronto, ON: Government of Ontario, 2011); Ontario Ministry of Education, *Guideline for School Fundraising* (Toronto, ON: Government of Ontario, 2012).
3. Ontario Ministry of Education, *Guideline for School Fundraising*, 1.
4. Ontario Ministry of Education, *Fees for Learning Materials and Activities Guideline*, 3.
5. Ontario Student Trustees' Association (OSTA), *OSTA-AECO Student and Parent Survey—Analysis and Results* (Toronto, ON: OSTA, People for Education, Student Vote, and ScholarshipsCanada.ca, October 21, 2011).
6. Huijie Guo and David R. Johnson, *Unfair Advantage? School Fundraising Capabilities and Student Results* (Toronto, ON: C.D. Howe Institute, 2017).
7. Vana Pistoris *The Results and Implications of Fundraising in Elementary Public Schools: Interviews with Ontario Principals* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto, 2012).
8. Comment from the 2016/17 survey, elementary school, Trillium Lakelands DSB.
9. Comment from the 2016/17 survey, elementary school, Peel DSB.
10. Comment from the 2016/17 survey, elementary school, Waterloo Region DSB.
11. Amy F. Feldman and Jennifer L. Matjasko, "The Role of School-Based Extracurricular Activities in Adolescent Development: A Comprehensive Review and Future Directions," *Review of Educational Research* 75, no. 2 (2005): 159-210; Amy Feldman Farb and Jennifer L. Matjasko, "Recent Advances in Research on School-Based Extracurricular Activities and Adolescent Development," *Developmental Review* 32, no. 1 (2012): 1-48.
12. Bruce Ferguson and Keith Power, "Broader Measures of Success: Physical and Mental Health in Schools," *Measuring What Matters* (Toronto, ON: People for Education, November 8, 2014), 6-7.